

# THE TWO RIVER TIMES

## HOLIDAY SHOW 'ELECTRIFIES' A FAMILY AUDIENCE



Dancers in Lightwire Theater wear electroluminescent wires in "A Very Electric Christmas" Dec. 27-30 at the Two River Theater.-Courtesy Two River Theater

By Mary Ann Bourbeau

RED BANK – Ian Carney and Corbin Popp met more than 10 years ago when they were dancing in the Billy Joel/Twyla Tharp Broadway musical, "Movin' Out." After discovering their mutual interest in art, theater and technology, the two became fast friends.

One day, they came across a product called electroluminescent, or EL wire, a thin, flexible wire that glows in the dark with neon colors. They began playing around with it to see what interesting uses they could come up with. The two discovered that it could be used in dancing, where the dancers, dressed in black, would be virtually erased from the stage and only the wire – adhered to their clothing – could be seen. As performers, the possibilities for its use seemed endless.

"We built our first character and would run around Central Park after hours," said Ian's wife, Eleanor Carney. "We ran into the NYPD on a couple of occasions, but they decided what we were doing was cool and they let us go."

Ian and Eleanor Carney, along with Corbin Popp and his wife Whitney, experimented further with shapes and designs and developed puppet characters that they could bring to life through dance. Since the four were all professionally trained dancers, it was a way to create something new and innovative in their field. They formed Lightwire Theater, and their first show was performed in Detroit in 2007.

“It was a show about a dinosaur,” said Carney. “We still perform it today.”

Lightwire Theater is bringing its holiday show to the Two River Theater from Dec. 27-30, with 10 shows at various times to accommodate all ages. “A Very Electric Christmas” is the story of a little bird flying south for the winter with his parents. The bird is blown away in a snowstorm and is separated from his parents. The story takes the audience on his journey to find his way home.

“The lights are very colorful and cool looking, but we’re big on story too,” said Eleanor Carney. “The lights are fun for 10 minutes but we want to give people something they can relate to. We like the theme of reuniting with family and being with the people you love for Christmas.”

Lightwire Theater gained national recognition when the NBC television show “America’s Got Talent” sought them out in 2012 and invited them to compete. “It was Howard Stern’s first season so we weren’t so sure about it,” Carney said. “But we realized that getting on TV just once would be such a positive experience for us.” They were one step away from the finals when they were eliminated. “The reach of that show is incredible,” Carney said. “It did what it needed to do for us.”

The Lightwire team builds everything themselves, with each character requiring about 200 hours of labor. The wires, which are attached to black fabric, are powered by batteries that are controlled by the dancers themselves.

“We could control it by computer, but it’s more artistic this way,” Carney said. “It makes for a more creative experience.”

Eleanor Carney met her husband Ian in ballet class in New Orleans when they were both 13 years old. Their careers took them to New York, where they met Corbin Popp. Popp earned a degree in biochemistry while also studying math, physics and dance at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Despite the degree, he decided to pursue dance and toured with Twyla Tharp’s dance company. He recently graduated from dental school but still works with Lightwire Theater. Whitney Popp also danced in “Movin’ Out” and now teaches dance in addition to performing in Lightwire Theater. They have a team of professional dancers who also perform in the shows, which are enjoyable for kids of all ages.

“The theater can become somewhat of a dinosaur,” Carney said “We’re up against video games, movies and Facebook. Getting a new generation into the theater is a big deal for us. We make sure there’s something in our shows for adults too. We don’t make our shows for children. We make them for people.”

Since its debut, Lightwire Theater has performed its electroluminescent artistry all over the world, including Singapore, Belarus, China, Russia, Colombia and Abu Dhabi.

“If you told me when my husband brought home that wire that all of this would happen, I never would have believed it,” Carney said. “The best part is that we found something that fulfills us as much as our ballet careers.”

“A Very Electric Christmas” is 60 minutes long. Tickets are \$20 for adults and \$15 for children 12 and under. For more information, visit [www.tworivertheater.org](http://www.tworivertheater.org).